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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (7/18): PRISONER EXCHANGE - FIRST
INDICATION THAT ISRAEL IS SERIOUS ABOUT PEACE

Main Stories:

For a third day, dailies lead with the Hizbollah/Israel prisoners' exchange. Al-Quds reports on Israeli fears that Hizbollah is now preparing a new battle technique in which rockets will target Israeli planes flying over Lebanon as well as Israeli warships. All dailies highlight an Israeli official's "threats" made during a July 17 print interview, to assassinate "liberated Lebanese prisoner" Samir Qintar. The papers also remind readers of the Israeli concern that Hizbollah will now seek revenge for the February assassination of Hizbollah leader Imad Mughniyah. Al-Quds leads with a photo of a truck, decorated with flowers, transporting the remains of Palestinian prisoners through a welcoming crowd in Beirut. Al-Ayyam's lead photo shows rows of caskets adorned in Palestinian and Lebanese flags, awaiting the opening of an official ceremony in Beirut. Al-Hayat Al-Jadida leads with a photo of Samir Qintar hugging his mother at his house in Beirut, "moments after his arrival."

The visit of Palestinian Authority Premier Salam Fayyad to the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics on July 17 in Ramallah is highlighted in the three dailies. During his visit, Fayyad emphasized that Palestinian internal division and Israeli "attacks" require Palestinians to reconsider the need for national unity immediately. Al-Ayyam reports that Fayyad called on all Palestinian factions to accept Palestinian Authority President Abbas' initiative for national dialogue and stressed that ending internal division should not be linked to reaching comprehensive agreement on other matters.

Israeli actions in Jerusalem and the West Bank capture front page headlines daily: The papers detail July 17 Israeli Defense Force operations that resulted in injuries in refugee camps near the West

Bank city of Nablus, injuries to peace activists near Ramallah and the confiscation of land near Hebron. In Jerusalem, the Al-Aqsa Institution, which works for the restoration of the city's Islamic sites, reported that Israeli police removed a sign carrying the name "Babul-Rahmah Cemetery," as part of the transformation of the cemetery into a public garden. The transformation comes after almost two years of controversy over the Israeli plans.

In more Jerusalem news, all dailies report that the Office of the Palestinian Authority President briefed the delegation of Palestinian negotiators in Washington on Israeli attempts to "occupy" the house of a family in East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. Al Ayyam reports that the negotiators subsequently called on Washington to intervene and halt all Israeli actions in Jerusalem.

Al-Ayyam, in an exclusive July 17 interview with Hamas leader, Fawzi Barhum, reports that Hamas believes that Israel continues to violate the truce in the Gaza Strip, due to the absence of Egyptian pressure.

U.S. Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Glassman is quoted extensively in an article by Al-Quds' Washington correspondent on page 2 of the paper. The article, which draws heavily on Glassman's recent editorial, is positive in tone, despite a lead paragraph which highlights that Glassman "admits" that the U.S. provides financial support to media outlets and non-governmental organizations in Arab and Muslim countries to improve its image. Glassman is quoted underscoring U.S. respect for Islam while also emphasizing the administration's efforts to counter

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extremism and confront terrorist groups.

BLOCK QUOTESQ

¶1. Al- Quds prints its daily editorial entitled, "And what about the 11,000 Palestinian Prisoners?" (7/18): "...the prisoners' exchange deal which took place a couple of days ago between Hizbollah and Israel was the successful result of difficult negotiations conducted under United Nations sponsorship and the help of mysterious German mediation. In addition to the happiness over the exchange, feelings of sadness also prevailed in memory of the large number of Palestinian and Arab martyrs who have been shot by Israeli Defense Forces over the past four decades... One cause remains a top priority for Palestinians - the 11,000 Palestinian prisoners still in the Israeli prisons, and Israel's insistence on keeping them there for several years to come despite on-going peace negotiations with the Palestinian National Authority... the release of these prisoners is the first and most important indication that Israel is really serious [about peace]... what is needed now is for the international community to keep this matter alive..."

¶2. Al-Ayyam runs an editorial by Muhammad Yaghi entitled, "Fourth place, in terms of importance" (7/18): "...the Palestinian cause will probably not be a foreign policy priority for the new U.S. President... because it seems that the destruction in the Middle East caused by the current American administration will not provide enough [political] space... the first priority [for the new president] will be evaluating the American military presence in Iraq...the second... will be the Iranian file... because America does not want to see a nuclear state...after Iran will come Afghanistan... To the U.S., these three issues will be too important to delay for the sake of dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict... the U.S. administration will not waste its diplomatic clout on a matter where the possibility of failure is much greater than success..."

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